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RUEHBK/AMEMBASSY BANGKOK 8539  
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 0680  
RUEHJA/AMEMBASSY JAKARTA 0270  
RUEHKL/AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR 0342  
RUEHGO/AMEMBASSY RANGOON 2700  
RUEHGP/AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE 3055  
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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 DHAKA 001316

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR SCA/PB AND EAP/MTS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [MASS](#) [MARR](#) [PGOV](#) [BG](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: BANGLADESH ASKS FOR USG HELP WITH BURMA

REF: A. DHAKA 1157

[1](#)B. DHAKA 1147

Classified By: JAMES F. MORIARTY, CHIEF OF MISSION. REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

Summary

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[1](#)1. (S) Bangladesh is extremely concerned about a Burmese military buildup along the land border between the two countries. While professing Bangladesh's desire for peace with its neighbor, Army Chief General Moeen Uddin Ahmed asked the Ambassador for assistance to assess the buildup, specifically requesting satellite imagery to assist the Bangladesh Army see the scope of the Burmese military presence and track further developments. Moeen told the Ambassador Bangladesh had no desire for conflict with Burma, but cautioned Bangladesh would defend itself against Burmese misbehavior. Separately, Bangladesh's Foreign Adviser told the Ambassador there had been no substantive discussions with the Burmese since the earlier naval confrontation. The Foreign Adviser said his Burmese counterpart was powerless and argued that the only answer to Rangoon's misdeeds at home and abroad was concerted ASEAN pressure on Burma to modify its behavior. End Summary.

Face-off in the Bay of Bengal

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[1](#)2. (C) On the margins of a December 13 meeting on another topic, Bangladesh's Chief of Army Staff, General Moeen Uddin Ahmed shared serious concerns about Burma and alleged the Burmese were building up troops near the land border with Bangladesh. Reviewing what he described as a successful visit by General Maung Aye in October, Moeen called the subsequent actions by the Burmese unwarranted. Burma and Bangladesh had dealt with a face-off over drilling in a contested area in November (reftels). The General assured the Ambassador that the drilling issue was on hold for now but the Bangladesh Navy continued to monitor the area where the Burmese allowed Daewoo, a Korean company, to station a drilling rig. Under Bangladeshi pressure, Daewoo had withdrawn the rig and its personnel. Bangladesh had maintained a naval presence at the site ever since.

Burma Seeks Revenge

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[1](#)3. (C) The Army Chief worried, however, that the Burmese Government was seeking revenge against Bangladesh for the offshore rig incident. Moeen described the Burmese military

establishment as "slow and logistically weak," but Moeen believed Burmese forces were increasing their presence near the border, about 30 kilometers in on the Burmese side. Moeen reminded the Ambassador that the Burmese military lived off the land as opposed to operating out of more easily identifiable fixed camps. Reports from arriving refugees had underscored the increasing desperation of the under-funded Burmese soldiers. Although refugee numbers had not increased in the recent months, their tales of treatment at the hands of Burmese soldiers reflected an increasingly frustrated Military, Moeen asserted.

14. (S) General Moeen called Burma one of the richest countries in the region (in terms of natural resources) but one of the most opaque. Moeen recalled the shifting of the capital from Rangoon to Naypyidaw -- a decision made at the recommendation of a Buddhist monk and executed with no notice in a few hours time. Moeen believed Burma wanted to get back the Indian rights to some oil exploration blocks in the Bay of Bengal. Moeen opined that cash-strapped Burma might sell these blocks to China instead in the hope that China would develop the blocks more quickly. Moeen concluded it was unlikely India would agree to give up their rights to the exploration blocks.

Moeen Requests US Assistance for Satellite Imagery to Assess Threat  
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15. (S) Moeen asked the Ambassador for satellite imagery on several ports inside Burma and at the land border, Bangladesh

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had gleaned information that the Burmese had unloaded a boatload of weapons at the Burmese port of Sitwe. Mongdu was the other port where the Bangladeshis suspect some sort of buildup was taking place. Moeen provided no details on the numbers of troops he believed were massing inside Burma or exactly where this might be. According to Moeen, Bangladesh has "no interest in a conflict" with Burma. That said, "if they try to be smart, we can't let them have a free run," he warned.

Foreign Adviser Urges ASEAN Involvement  
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16. (C) During a December 17 meeting, Foreign Adviser Dr. Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury said Bangladesh had been unable to re-establish contact with the Burmese junta since General Maung's visit. Chowdhury said his counterpart, the Burmese Foreign Minister, was powerless and argued that the military called all the shots in Burma. Chowdhury claimed Daewoo had removed its rig in November solely because of pressure from the Korean Government. Chowdhury said the only way to induce the Burmese Regime to change its policies at home and abroad was through concerted pressure from its ASEAN neighbors. To this end, Chowdhury had taken advantage of a recent Ministerial meeting in Bali to build support for Bangladesh's position on the maritime boundary dispute. He said that Singapore, in particular, was interested in Bangladesh's views on Burma. Chowdhury also believed Indonesia was fed up with Burmese actions, and cited Jakarta's recent delay in granting agreement to Rangoon's Ambassador-designate as proof.

Speaking personally, Chowdhury reiterated his interest in serving as the UN Secretary General's Special Representative for Burma, claiming his contacts in the region made him better suited for this role than the current incumbent, Gambari.

Comment  
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17. (S) We are at a key juncture in the U.S. - Bangladesh relationship with the possibility of a real change in direction (for the better) on a number of fronts, including information sharing. The maritime dispute with Burma, and

the unexpected increase in military tension, took Bangladesh by surprise. It appears that the issue will remain unresolved through Bangladesh's upcoming December 29 parliamentary election and transition. Dhaka's negotiators tell us they have little hope of progress in the next round of technical bilateral talks with Burma. We think it would be useful to be forward leaning in sharing information as well as passing satellite imagery to Bangladesh regarding Rangoon's intentions. In addition, we should work with the GOB and others in the region to moderate Burmese behavior at home and abroad.

MORIARTY